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Touchpaper

The Newsletter of the
WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS
FRIENDS ASSOCIATION



March
1999

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PLEASE NOTE: Deadline date for submissions for
 the next issue is 17th May 1999



EDITORIAL



Although it's a bit late, Happy New Year to you all!

In this issue we have two guest articles relating to the history of the site. One, by a member of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society on Congreve Rockets and an one giving a family link found by a genealogical researcher.

There have been some significant changes in the planned project timetable with the planned opening delayed as detailed on the WARGM Progress report.

Because of this the role of the Friends has been further defined and we are now have a revised strategy for our volunteer effort. Our value to the project is recognized by the Board and is of increasing importance to the development of the project.

At this time it seems unlikely that a further 'Heritage Weekend' will be held this year but, for the Friends, we hope to arrange a special opportunity to visit in the summer.

Norman Paul Editor



FRIENDS ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

STRATEGY FOR VOLUNTEER EFFORT

The Association has taken on a number of responsibilities at the site and regular working parties are held to which any members will be welcome. At present these are held each Friday morning but additional days may be necessary in the future. If anyone is able to assist please contact the Editor for details.

Future Work:

Continue Artefact identification and cataloguing.
Catalogue photo and document archives and enter cataloguing on computer database.
Minor landscape and building maintenance.

Site Visits:

Friends have undertaken responsibility for the organization of visits by small groups from local societies.

Talks to other Groups and Societies:

Both on and off-site.

Both Site Visits and Talks are important activities. They help us raise the profile of the project and may also result in specialist help in the project development.

Oral History Project:

Taped interviews with ex-employees.
Database of interviews to be established cross referenced to subject matter and dates.

Recently we have been asked to participate in the management of the natural history aspects of the site. For example, in the Spring it is intended to construct an otter habitat. Details of special working parties will be given when known.

FRIENDS ACTIVITIES

WORKING PARTIES

Current Work: At this time the main effort is on the cataloguing of photos and documents because this is can be done in the comfort of the heated old Library building (A203). The physical artefacts are currently housed in L168 which is unheated. Work there will continue when the weather improves.

A large room has been made available in A203 with access to a computer for the database. We are currently cataloguing the large collection of slides. It is our intention to produce a definitive set of slides which can be used for various talks and to provide agreed texts.

A major problem arising in the current work is identifying dates, people and places in unmarked photographs. An example is shown here. Does any past employee know who this person is, what the equipment is and the approximate date it was taken?



We probably have over 400 slides ranging from pictures of buildings and works from the earliest days to relatively modern views of the site. In addition there are numerous historical slides pertaining to the production of gunpowder, guncotton and cordite. Even so, there are obvious gaps in the collection which will need to be filled and when we have completed the task of cataloguing all the slides this will be our next objective.

We now have a dedicated working space on site for the Friends so, if you are able, why not come along and help?

Bryan Howard Working Party Organiser

WARGM PROGRESS - IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

MOVE OF OPENING DATE

Preparation of the Site has started and the company's professional advisors have been defining a detailed design. In addition, a business plan is being put together in order that the financial viability of the Site is assured. This preparatory work has now made it clear that the fast track timetable for fully opening the Site in Spring 2000, in time for the 'Millennium' is too ambitious, if the company is to deliver the exciting and competitive attraction that the company wants to create and the public will wish to see.

As a result the company has decided to revert to its original timetable which provides for opening in early 2001, a more realistic date if this unique site and its story are to be presented in a manner worthy of them, and with the highest standards adopted. During the lengthy and essential decontamination works that were undertaken there had been significant and far reaching excavations carried out and it was in the current planning stage of the design that the full extent of the necessary infrastructure rebuilding was appreciated. A further factor is that the major part of the site is scheduled as an ancient monument. In such cases all works to be carried out are subject to stringent planning and authorisation procedures involving negotiation of consents from the various statutory bodies.

We hope that you will understand the need for this change and that you will continue to give your support. Despite the change in timetable there will be opportunities to visit the site for special events which will be arranged in this interim period. Opportunities will also arise for special working group participation by members.

FUTURE PLANS

As you may be aware the financing of the project arises from two sources:

Firstly, £6.5 million is available from the Heritage Lottery Fund BUT this does not mean that the company has actually received this money. The way in which the fund works is that monies, up to that limit, is available to pay major invoices arising from the development, provided that the company matches the amounts by 13%.

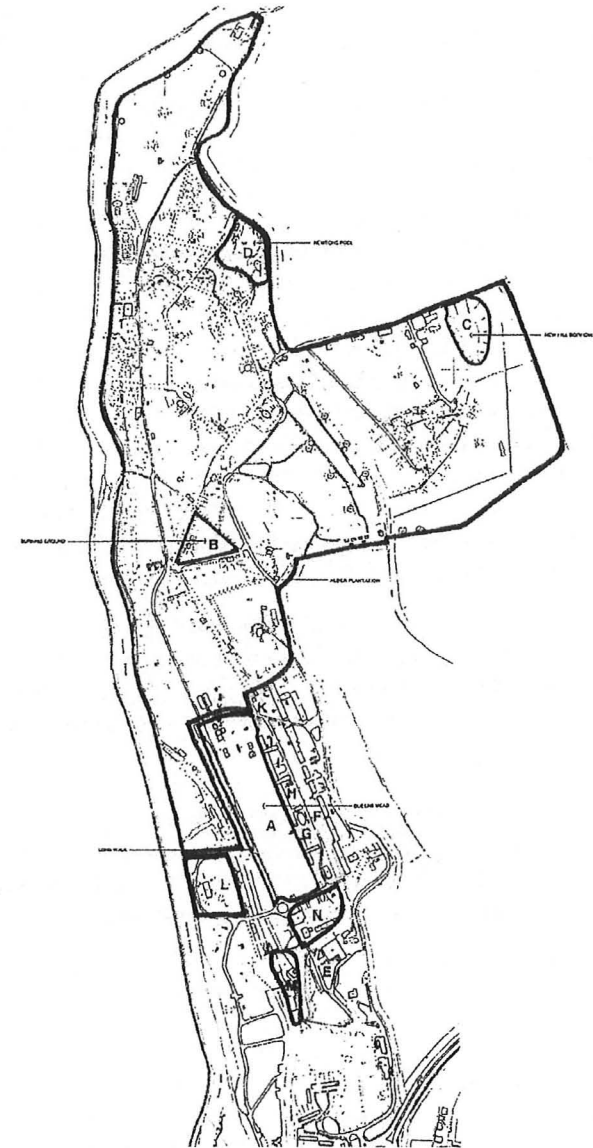
Secondly the MoD has given an endowment of £5 million which is held in trust. The company can secure monies from investment PROVIDED that the endowment capital is maintained at £5 million. It is this income which represents the company's working fund.

For the project to be a real success it is clear that we shall need significant extra income from sponsorship and a quality brochure has been produced which is essential to this effort. This activity will be the major undertaking by the company over the next few months.

Current work on the site relates to the woodland management. During the years of neglect the woodland, originally instituted as a source of material for charcoal, has become overgrown. The original alder and willow plantations have been much invaded by sycamore which, in many cases, have been invasive of many important buildings. The process of thinning out and removal is nearing completion with a programme of replanting taking place.

Detailed design for the first phase up to opening is complete. This is a very comprehensive document which we are unable to reproduce here. What we will do, in coming issues, is to highlight the main issues and plans. Work will be starting later in this year, allowing sufficient time for completion in 2001.

THE WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS SITE



FAMILY HISTORY

A FAMILY LINK TO THE GUNPOWDER MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

A number of factories in Britain, all in private ownership, were making gunpowder during the early 17th century. Nevertheless, demand for supplies of gunpowder by the government was not being reliably met by the private owners of these mills and in 1760 the Board of Ordnance acquired the Home Works at Faversham, followed by the acquisition of mills at Waltham Abbey in 1787 and Ballincollig, Co Cork in 1804. These mills were run by the Board of Ordnance for some time until returned into private ownership; Faversham in 1825 and Ballincollig in 1834. Only Waltham Abbey remained a Royal factory.

My great, great, great grandfather, James O'Brien (1777 - 1842) was employed for 23 years until 1821 at the Royal Gunpowder Mills at Faversham as a Brimstone Refiner. He was, according to the 1831 census, born in Ireland and, after marrying Jane Jones in 1797 at Bobbing in Kent, raised a family of 7 children, all born in Faversham. In 1821 James and his eldest son James Edward were both made redundant by the Board of Ordnance. Documents in the Public Record Office record the correspondence between James senior and the Board as he fought to obtain a pension since he had little hope of finding alternative work due to the "peculiar nature of his work". He was eventually awarded a pension of "one shilling and five and a half pence per day for six days in the week" but the young James, who had by then served with his father in the sulphur refinery for seven years, received nothing. James senior died in 1842 aged 65 years.

It seems that the young James Edward continued to reside in Faversham for a few years but it is not clear whether he found continued employment in the mills. He married Martha Quartermain at Hadlow in Kent in 1823. They raised a large family with three children born in Faversham but between 1830-1847 a further nine children were born at Waltham Abbey while the family lived at Highbridge Street. In 1861 his son Thomas had joined him in the sulphur refinery at the Waltham Abbey Mills. James died in 1866 at Sulphur Cottage, Eleanor Road, Cheshunt and Martha died some years later. Both are buried in the old cemetery at Waltham Abbey and the grave is marked by a clearly readable headstone. Sulphur Cottage is today clearly distinguished by the engraved namestone in the gable end.

So, three generations of O'Briens earned a living as sulphur refiners in this most unusual industry.

Simon Malone Thetford, Norfolk

This article was forwarded to us by Prof. Alan Crocker of the Gunpowder Study Group and gives a fascinating insight into the social history of the early days. It is information of this kind which helps us to flesh out the bare bones of historical records. We would welcome any similar information arising from peoples genealogical research.

[6]

PROFILE: The WARGM Chief Executive

Robert Saunders was appointed to the post of Chief Executive Officer by the WARGM Board in June this year and is making significant progress in implementing the Board policy on the development.



Bob graduated from Manchester University with a BA Hons. degree in Economics and Social Studies. He is also a Member of the Institute of Marketing with a Diploma in Marketing. His early career was in the development and implementation of sales and marketing strategy at ESSO and British Leyland then moving to a Senior Consultant Marketing group working for a number of client companies.

In 1984 Bob became the Marketing Director for the new Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow (a £60 million facility), reporting directly to the Chief

Executive. His efforts here included identification of new market sectors contributing to a 50% increase over original forecasts.

In 1986 he was the winner of a Special DTI Award for Commercial Enterprise. In 1988 Bob became the Managing Director of the principal subsidiary of the Centre and, within little over a year, had returned that company to profitability and increased turnover by 110%. A major factor was his ability to secure major sponsorship agreements, considered to be an important aspect for the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills project.

In 1991 Bob became Director of Scottish Operations for the Institute of Management Resources handling a wide range of consultancy projects. From his success in a project involving installation of computerised patient administration system for a local hospital he was asked to join the Argyll and Clyde Health Board as a commercial consultant where he continued to handle similar projects and also identified revenue generating and cost reduction opportunities with great success. At this time he hoped to realise his dream of establishing a major Scottish Tourist attraction - Park Scotia. This project suffered from the lack of a specific site and the attendant planning difficulties. At this time the project is in abeyance.

In addition to his undoubted management and entrepreneurial competencies Bob is also something of a writer as joint author of Harper's Handbook to Edinburgh which was the winner of the 1982 International Guide Book of the Year Award.

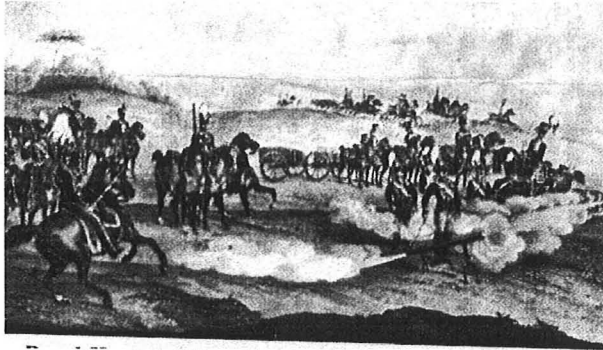
Bob says that he likes the WARGM project because it has a site and therefore he can immediately get to grips with the development. His main task in the coming months is to seek major additional funding through corporate and educational agency sponsorship and, to this end, has produced a comprehensive and high class brochure.

[7]

CONGREVE

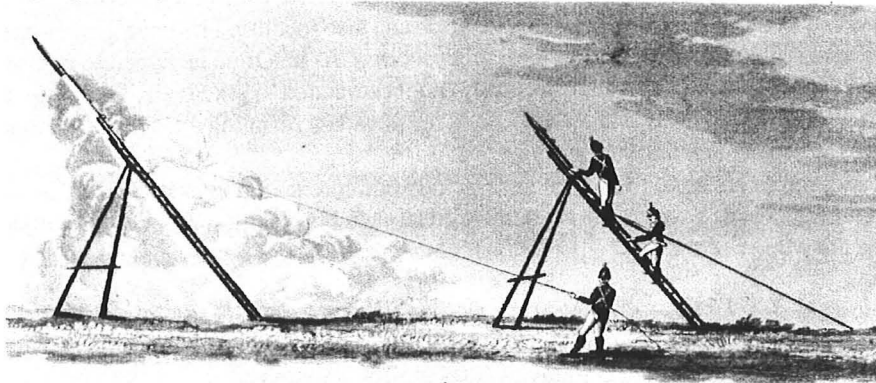
From an article by Dinah Dean of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society

During the war in India between the British and Tipoo Sahib in the 1790's, Tipoo's army made some impression on the British by the use of batteries of primitive rockets against their infantry in square formation. This was noted by artillery officers and reported to the War Office. This report was apparently read by Major William Congreve of the Royal Artillery, later Comptroller of the Royal Laboratory at Woolwich Arsenal and also responsible for the production of gunpowder at the Government's recently acquired mills at Waltham Abbey. He started to experiment with improved rockets, starting production of them for military use in 1806 and setting up a Rocket Brigade within the Royal Artillery.



Royal Artillery Rocket Brigade ca.1807

These rockets were similar to ordinary firework rockets, but much larger, each having a pole six feet long on to one end of which was slotted a metal cylinder stuffed with a gunpowder propellant charge, then a more powerful gunpowder charge (and wadding) which exploded when the fuse had burned as far as the upper part of the cylinder. This caused the warhead to disintegrate, flinging red-hot metal and burning wadding for several yards around. Aiming the rockets was a very chancy affair, depending on the skill of the battery commander in judging altitude and distance by eye. The rockets were fired from an A-shaped frame on which they were leant, altitude being adjusted by the angle of the frame.



Test firings before military officers on the range at Purfleet were not markedly successful but the Prince Regent, who (wrongly) believed himself a military genius, was very impressed and supported Congreve with enthusiasm.

ROCKETS

The first active service use occurred in 1807, when it became necessary to repeat Nelson's destruction of the Danish fleet in Copenhagen harbour, to prevent seizure by the French. A combined naval and army force was sent to carry out this task, taking a battery of the Rocket Brigade with it, and the rockets, according to Sir Arthur Bryant "made a fearful noise and had a propensity for setting things on fire" actually managed to hit and set fire to several ships.

Army commanders however, were reluctant to use the rockets, mainly because they were extremely noisy and frightened the horses on which the army were very dependent (the worst cardinal sin). The Prince Regent insisted on sending a battery to assist Sir Arthur Wellesley in the Peninsula War which caused a Wellingtonian comment that "they would be very useful if he wanted to set a town on fire, which he did not since all the towns were inhabited by the friendly Spanish and Portuguese". Elsewhere the Rocket Brigade scored its first real success. In October 1813 the combined Russian, Austrian and Swedish armies, plus a lone battery of the Brigade fought and defeated Napoleon at Leipsig in the Battle of the Nations. On the second day of the battle the Battery commander was killed and command fell on a young lieutenant who set and fired one salvo which virtually wiped out a French regiment advancing near the village of Paunsdorf. Czar Alexander of Russia, who was standing nearby, was so impressed that he took his own badge of the Order of St Catherine and pinned it on the lieutenant's uniform.

In 1814 the British attempted to capture the American naval dockyard at Baltimore which was protected from the sea by Fort McHenry. The fort was bombarded by the Royal Navy for the whole of one night, the Rocket battery also taking part but the fort failed to surrender. The scene was witnessed by an American lawyer, Francis Scott Key who wrote a poem, "The Star Spangled Banner" mentioning the "Rockets Red Glare" which forms the link between Waltham Abbey where the rockets were made and the American National Anthem.

Later that same year the French surrendered and the Prince Regent organised a huge jubilee festival to celebrate the centenary of the Hanoverian dynasty, including of course, fireworks and he insisted that the Rocket Brigade should also take part. It is not recorded that they did any damage to anyone or anything on this occasion!

The Brigade's last success came the following year, 1815, when Napoleon escaped from Elba, reformed his armies and was advancing on Belgium. The advance guard of the allied army, led by the former Sir Arthur Wellesley, now Duke of Wellington, was faced by Marshal Ney at Quatre Bras. After a sharp battle Wellington ordered his forces to fall back to Waterloo. During the retreat the Rocket battery, its iron frame disassembled and its rockets loaded horizontally on a flat bed cart found itself being overtaken by French cavalry. The officer in charge, with great presence of mind, lit the fuses and fired them back along the road, effectively blocking the cavalry advance and allowing his men to escape. After that the Brigade was disbanded and the Congreve rocket does not appear to have been used as a weapon again. They were however adapted for use, particularly at sea, as a distress signal and as a means of passing a towline or breeches-buoy line from ship to ship.

Chris Hicks article in the last issue asked for information on the Gun Cap Factory resulting in two responses from members.

I think these give the definitive answer to the question relating to the location of the Gun Cap Factory:

I was very interested in the article in the last Touchpaper relating to the 1891 census of workers at the RGPF from the Waltham cross area submitted by Chris Hicks. This raises a question as to where was Cold Hall Road. I was born in Lea Road (1922) which was then under the Essex Council and, although this was only a short distance from Harold, Melbourne and Sidney Roads I have never heard of Cold Hall Road. I have in my possession maps of 1864 and they mention Cold Hall Lands and what was 'Powers' Timber yard in Station Road is called Cold Hall Farm. Another point of interest to me is that my name is mentioned twice in the census.

Regarding the Gun Cap Factory, this was originally Nobels in Farm Hill Road on the old Catalins site, now flats. I have a book written by Ken Bascombe which shows Joyce House (now Joyce Court) built by Mr Joyce who moved his percussion cap factory to the Abbey in 1842. It was always known locally as Nobels Cap Factory and was a very important place during the 1914-18 war period.

George Savill

The following facts may be of use in defining the Gun Cap Factory:

1. My mother who was born in Waltham New Town in 1874, often spoke of Joyce's Powder Factory which was situated in Farm Hill Road. Joyce House was obviously associated with it.
2. Prior to 1939, Catalin's Factory was known as Nobel's.
3. The Sewardstone Gate of RGPF was known as the ICI gate up until 1939 - at least one building (P719) was fenced off and was rented to ICI as a magazine.

From the above it is apparent that there was a second factory dealing with explosives in Waltham Abbey and in later years was probably engaged in filling shot gun cartridges. There was a shot tower on the Ely's estate in Angel Road Edmonton when I was young. This may well have been associated with the filling operation at Waltham Abbey.

I wish I lived nearer and was able to help out on the working parties.

Dick Doe

The article on the 1891 Census in the Cheshunt area has prompted one of our members to do the same for the Waltham Abbey area.

John Vernon has obtained a copy of the census and is working his way through it. Look out for the results in a future issue

Letter from Australia

Yes, Touchpaper is international being read in the USA and Australia!

Joan Hills, who used to work at the Establishment, emigrated to Australia some years ago and tells us that Touchpaper is much appreciated. She has a good friend there who has given us a photo of her late husband. They used to live in Waltham Abbey and had some connection with the Green Dragon public house. His name was Robert Mills and he was a keen cricketer, playing at one time for the RSAF team. Perhaps some of our older members may remember playing against him in the 40's.



We are sorry to hear of the death of TED TULLETT who died on 15th November aged 90 years at Paternoster House.

Ted started work in the old RGPF before the war as a self-taught electrician. He was called up and was promoted to the rank of sergeant within three weeks, as a tradesman. After war service he returned to the factory where he remained until his retirement in 1973.

Ted was well known in Waltham Abbey and miles around, for his 24 hour, seven day a week private electrical work, usually arriving on his heavily laden bicycle.

DON'T FORGET THE DEADLINE OF May 17th FOR INCLUSION OF ARTICLES IN THE NEXT ISSUE DUE FOR PUBLICATION EARLY JUNE

THE NEXT ISSUE ALSO MARKS THE FIRST FULL YEAR OF THE ASSOCIATION WHEN RENEWAL OF THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION BECOMES DUE

THE JUNE ISSUE WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY YOUR RENEWAL FORM AND QUESTIONNAIRE

EXTRA BYTES

One of our elder members and a long serving employee of the Establishment, Ken Bascombe, is currently in a retirement home in Wiltshire. In



addition to his scientific work Ken was a very keen historian and has helped considerably in the past in documenting some of the history of the site. We have been sent a photograph of Ken taken last summer at Longleat. Ken sends all his best wishes to members.

FRIENDS ASSOCIATION TIE

At a recent meeting of the committee it was agreed that we should go ahead and order a number of Friends Association ties bearing the Association logo (see front page). Cost is expected to be in the region of £5 and we hope to have these available by the date of the next issue in June.

The ties will be dark blue with a gold/yellow embroidered logo.

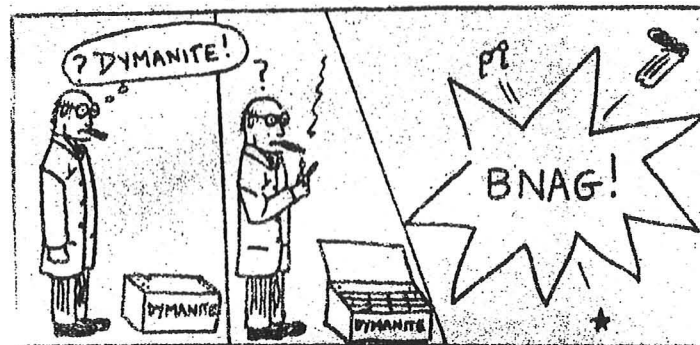
This raises the question "What can we do for the ladies?" I'm afraid that the committee couldn't come up with any reasonable suggestions so perhaps our lady members can tell us what they would like.

In the future we may also be able to offer T-Shirts or similar apparel at reasonable cost.

Any other ideas and guidance would be much appreciated.

MISCELLANY

Here is another cartoon from the annals of 'Quickmatch', the Establishment's Social Club newsletter drawn by one of the policeman from the MOD Guardforce, Ray Hackett.



CHRISTMAS PUZZLE ANSWERS:

CHRISTMAS CONNECTIONS

Brown haired John aged 5 got a scooter, Blond Jill aged 6 got a doll, Auburn haired Janet aged 7 got a game, Ginger James aged 8 got a train and Black haired Judith, being the oldest at 9, got a bike.

HEADS & TAILS

SHUSH	EMBLEM	ORATOR	AMALGAM
REIGNED	NEPTUNE	..FF. (?)	TESTATE
DECADE	ONION	EDITED	PERISCOPE
LEGIBLE	REQUIRE	SHEEPISH	ANGLICAN
MAXIMA	GEORGE	EDIFIED	KEEPSAKE

Sorry about ..FF..

This should have been ..FFE.. and the answer was TAFFETA

'CROSSWORD'

1	P	2	U	3	N	4	C	5	H
6	P	U	N	C	H				
7	P	U	N	C	H				
8	P	U	N	C	H				
9	P	U	N	C	H				

**WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY
PUZZLES, COMPETITIONS
OR SUITABLE CARTOONS**